



NEWS RELEASE

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MASSIVE RACKETEERING CASE TARGETS HAWAIIAN GARDENS GANG INVOLVED IN MURDER OF SHERIFF'S DEPUTY, ATTACKS ON AFRICAN-AMERICANS AND WIDESPREAD DRUG TRAFFICKING

88 Arrested Today as Part of Largest Federal Gang Prosecution in U.S. History

In the nation's largest-ever gang sweep, approximately 1,400 law enforcement officers this morning swept across the City of Hawaiian Gardens to arrest dozens of people named in a federal RICO indictment that describes a war against the Los Angeles Sheriff's Department, as well as systematic efforts to rid the community of African-Americans with a campaign of shootings and other attacks.

The investigation into the Varrio Hawaiian Gardens gang began after the fatal shooting of Los Angeles Sheriff's Deputy Jerry Ortiz, who was gunned down four years ago by a gang member he was attempting to arrest on suspicion of shooting an African-American man. While the gang member, Jose Orozco, was quickly apprehended and currently sits on death row, the shooting of Deputy Ortiz sparked an investigation that culminated with today's takedown that has dealt a severe blow to the gang that has terrorized Hawaiian Gardens for nearly 50 years.

During today's enforcement action, which was part of "Operation Knock Out," 88 defendants were arrested on federal and state charges. 63 of those arrests were pursuant to five federal indictments, which name a total of 147 defendants. With 35 defendants already in custody, there are now 98 defendants

ready to be prosecuted in federal court. The remaining 49 defendants named in the federal indictments are either fugitives being sought by authorities or individuals who investigators are working to identify. Additional arrests are expected in this case.

“Operation Knock Out has led to federal indictments against 147 gang members, making it the largest gang sweep in U.S. history,” said United States Attorney Thomas P. O’Brien. “More than 50 members and associates of the Hawaiian Gardens gang are charged with violating the federal RICO statute – the same law that we used to knock out the mafia and which we have used with great success in Southern California in recent years to dismantle other criminal gangs.”

LASD Assistant Sheriff Paul Tanaka stated: “Jerry Ortiz was an outstanding deputy sheriff and a good family man who was murdered by a cowardly Hawaiian Gardens gang member. The senseless murder of Deputy Ortiz brought new-found attention to the fact that this multi-generational gang had been terrorizing neighborhoods, running drugs and committing violent crimes for many years. The primary purpose of Operation Knock Out was to make the community a safer place for all those who had suffered under the oppressive reign of this gang. May Deputy Ortiz rest in peace.”

In addition to the murder of Deputy Ortiz, the racketeering indictment discusses other violent attacks, drug trafficking, carjackings and kidnappings. For example, George Manuel Flores, the lead defendant in the RICO indictment and a longtime member of the Hawaiian Gardens gang, allegedly ordered the murder of another gang member who was believed to be cooperating with law enforcement and Flores allegedly provided a young gang member with a weapon and instructed him to shoot African-Americans who lived nearby.

“The careful process of building a racketeering case, while demanding, resulted in an unprecedented number of people being charged, to include top-echelon members of the gang,” said Salvador Hernandez, Assistant Director in Charge of the FBI in Los Angeles. “The law-abiding citizens of Hawaiian Gardens have endured terrorizing witness intimidation, ethnic bigotry and violence around every corner for decades. Today's arrests are paving the way to justice and a

better way of life for those residents.”

During this investigation, approximately 31 pounds of methamphetamine were seized, along with lesser quantities of other narcotics. DEA Special Agent in Charge Timothy J. Landrum stated: “Today's arrests send a message to those who are responsible for bringing violence and distress onto the streets of Los Angeles, that law enforcement is working together to take back our neighborhoods and get violent drug traffickers and street gangs out of our communities.”

Below is a breakdown of the cases unsealed this morning as part of Operation Knock Out:

- *United States v. Flores, et al.*, the racketeering indictment that was returned by a federal grand jury on May 6. This indictment charges 57 defendants. Out of the 57 defendants in this indictment, 21 are already in custody and 36 were subject to arrest today.
- *United States v. Henley, et al.*, which was indicted on April 8. This case charges 20 defendants linked to the Hawaiian Gardens gang, 13 of whom were subject to arrest today, in a scheme to distribute crack cocaine, heroin, powder cocaine, methamphetamine and marijuana. Four of the defendants in this case are already in custody. Three of the defendants have yet to be identified.
- *United States v. Barajas, et al.*, which charges 20 defendants in a superseding indictment returned on April 8. In this case, two defendants are already in custody and five defendants, three of whom are believed to be in Mexico, have not been fully identified. Therefore, 13 of the defendants in this narcotics case were subject to arrest today.
- *United States v. Sotelo, et al.*, which was indicted on April 29. This indictment charges 21 members of several street gangs, two of whom are already in custody and two of whom have not been fully identified, in a wide-ranging conspiracy to distribute methamphetamine. Seventeen defendants in this indictment were subject to arrest today.
- *United States v. Ramirez, et al.*, is a 29-defendant indictment that was returned on May 14 and charges members and associates of a Paramount-

based gang. Out of the 29 defendants accused of conspiring to distribute a variety of narcotics, 25 were subject to arrest today as four are already in custody.

The defendants arrested this morning will be making initial appearances this afternoon in federal court in both Los Angeles and Santa Ana. If convicted of the charges alleged in the indictments, all of the defendant faces mandatory minimum sentences and approximately 15 defendants face mandatory sentences of life without parole.

During Operation Knock Out, investigators seized approximately 105 firearms. "We took some very violent criminals off of the streets today and seized the tools of their trade – firearms," said John A. Torres, Special Agent in Charge of the ATF's Los Angeles Field Division. "ATF will now continue the process of tracing these firearms and targeting those who illegally supplied them to these ruthless gang members."

Robert Schoch, Special Agent in Charge of the ICE Office of Investigations in Los Angeles, stated: "Today's operation should leave no doubt about our collective resolve to attack and dismantle the street gangs that are terrorizing our neighborhoods. ICE will continue to use its unique immigration and customs authorities to target these organizations and combat the violence and intimidation they use to hold our communities hostage to fear."

Leslie P. DeMarco, Special Agent in Charge of IRS - Criminal Investigation's Los Angeles Field Office, commented: "Today's enforcement operations mark the beginning of the end of the Varrio Hawaiian Gardens street gang. As a part of the HIDTA task force, IRS - Criminal Investigation specializes in following the money in illegal narcotic and criminal racketeering operations, with the intent to financially disrupt and dismantle these organizations, enabling increased criminal prosecutions and asset forfeitures."

Operation Knock Out was an investigation into Varrio Hawaiian Gardens conducted by the Los Angeles High-Intensity Drug Trafficking Area (HIDTA) Task Force, which is comprised of agents and officers with the Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department; the Drug Enforcement Administration; the Federal Bureau of

Investigation; the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives; U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE); and IRS-Criminal Investigation. The following agencies provided extraordinary support during the investigation and this morning's operation: the United States Marshals Service, the California Department of Justice's Bureau of Narcotics Enforcement, the Long Beach Police Department, the Ridgecrest Police Department, the Downey Police Department, the Kern County Sheriff's Department, the Bell Gardens Police Department, the Costa Mesa Police Department, the California Highway Patrol, the Joint Forces Joint Training Base at Los Alamitos, the Los Angeles Police Department, the South Gate Police Department, the Hawthorne Police Department, the Montebello Police Department, the Santa Monica Police Department, PROAC, the Ontario Police Department, the San Diego Narcotics Task Force, the Riverside Sheriff's Department, LA Impact, the San Bernardino Sheriff's Department, the Los Angeles County District Attorney's Office, and the Los Angeles County Department of Children and Family Services' Multi Agency Response Team, which rescued 26 children this morning.

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